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ABSTRACT

As this survey of the literature shows, the relationship between sports participation and the academic success which is expected to lead to material and social benefits is ambivalent and inconclusive. If sports participation does have an impact on academic goals, it does so only when coupled with a range of sociopersonal and cultural variables. Participating in organized athletics translates into upward social mobility only as the participant parlays sports achievement into social relationships and skills essential to upwardly mobile outcomes. Black athletes at both the high school and college levels do not use sports achievement in this way. Black high school athletes aspire to college without being academically and socially ready. College failure is often the consequence, when the demands of big-time sports and academic pressure converge on the poorly prepared students. White athletes capitalize more readily on their sports activity. Although more research is needed, race appears to influence the lack of social changes in the lives of young, black athletes. Athleticism seems insufficient to overcome the racist character of American institutions, including organized sports. At the college level, the black athlete seems to be exploited by the athletic experience rather than benefiting from it. Large numbers of black college athletes do not graduate in four years, and most never receive a degree. (CMG)

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Sport and Social Mobility Research: The Role of Race

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Sport and Social Mobility Research: The Role of Race

Americans have historically focused on the opportunity in the social structure to lift the most indigent to the greatest heights. Nowhere within this society can one find greater investment in the meritorious quality of its institutions than in athletics (Eitzen and Sage 1978). Immigrant groups during their early days of ethnic and social class discrimination in America used boxing specifically as a means of upward mobility when other opportunities were denied them (Coakley 1978). The sports creed held that this arena of American culture was free from racial, ethnic and social class barriers (Eitzen and Sage 1978). Within this framework one could move as far as talent would allow. Ability was the only discriminatory valence. It was indeed the melting pot of the American mosaic. It was the unique social and racial leveler for the "wretched of the earth" (Eitzen and Sage 1978; McPherson 1977). Sports participation had healing powers and could mean economic and social prestige for those successful persons. This bright sport in an otherwise dismal existence was more important for no other group than for the African-American (McPherson 1977).

On the surface, athletics has always seemed to go well with Black people. Either from within or from without, Black people have experienced and understood the place of sport in their lives and in the psyche of America. Bittersweet is the experience--on the one hand is often the

glory of accomplishment, on the other are the dashed hopes and the return to the oppressive realities of racism. For all too long the color line has reached from the workplace to the playing fields, courts and arenas of this nation. Nevertheless, sports activity came to give Black people a vast majority of their heroes and to some degree their heroines, gave a sense of dignity in dehumanizing conditions while striving for achievement in a racially stratified society (Clement 1954). Black sports figures loom larger than life--Joe Louis, Jackie Robinson, Jesse Owens, Wilma Rudolph, Althea Gibson, Julius "Dr. J" Irving, Willie Mays. To Black people the rhapsody of their physical movement was an emotional and symbolic achievement...that of being the master...of finally being free. Some Black leaders and journalists likened Black sport success as the model for racial inequality and integration. A. S. "Doc" Young, a Black journalist submitted "Negroes approach closer to the democratic ideal in the world of sports than in any facet of American life." He attributed the success of Black athletes to the qualities of the institution of sport. "Indeed, the most marvelous gift of sports is its faculty for making heroes of underdogs, of lifting the downtrodden up to solid ground....It seems fitting, natural and normal that sports today provide for American Negroes the closest approach to the great goal they dream about, talk about, sing about, pray and work for, every moment of every living day that comes and piles into weeks, months and years" (1963).

A famous writer, Jack Olsen (1968), notes the racial character of sport, "Every morning the world of sport wakes up and congratulates itself on its contributions to race relations. The litany has been repeated so

many times that it is believed almost universally."

History will indicate that Blacks have been willful and unwillful participants in sports competition. One sociologist determined that British General Percy, upon the fall of Richmond during the Revolutionary War, took a Black slave whom he named Bill Richmond (after the city of capture). He relates that under the General's sponsorship the ex-slave became a famous boxer and had a long and successful career in England (Loy 1977).

Black participation in organized sport is not new. Male slaves were pitted against one another in fisticuffs within and between southern plantations. Successful fighters raised their social value and enjoyed a more privileged relationship with their plantation owners. Athletics historically has symbolized a positive transformation of the social and material reality of Black people (McPherson 1977). From the early 19th century through early Reconstruction, slaves and freedmen participated in organized sport in America, primarily through boxing. During this period Black men played in organized baseball, Black jockeys rode winners in three Kentucky Derbys in the 1880's, and Black fighters held almost all of the weight divisions in boxing. With the collaboration of the power elite of the northern and southern ruling classes, Reconstruction racism virtually shut down diverse sport activity by Blacks in the South as social and economic hegemony returned to the southern aristocracy. Blacks, driven from baseball, horse racing and other sports, organized their own leagues and sports associations under the aegis of state laws and customs of the Jim Crow era. Not until 1947 and the advent of Jackie Robinson was the color line broken in big-time sports (McPherson 1977).

The era of the Civil Rights Movement marks the next major turning point for Black athletes, for soon and in substantial numbers they fill the ranks of intercollegiate and professional football and basketball. Imbedded in athletic participation is the assumption that the Black athlete is socially better off for having been an athlete. With this assumption in mind, this paper will attempt to determine how educational achievement is effected by Black athletic participation. The focus is on a review of the literature regarding the effects of athletic participation on educational attainment of high school and college Black student-athletes (McPherson 1977). What must be appreciated at the outset is the fact that little in the way of social science has focused on the effect of Black athletic behavior on academic and educational achievement. Rigorous research on the relationship of race to social mobility via athletics is a rare instance in the literature (Braddock 1980). Picou and Curry (1974) point to the fact that a majority of subjects in sports studies as being northeastern, urban White males.

Some researchers has observed the relationship between educational achievement and athletic participation as regards social mobility. They suggest that athletic activity facilitates educational achievement which in turn assures access to the social and material benefits of life (McPherson 1977). Given the importance of social mobility to this paper, some understanding of the concept seems justified. Pitirim Sorikin (1959) in a highly regarded work defines social mobility in two dimensions:

> There are two principal types of social mobility, horizontal and vertical. By

> horizontal social mobility or shifting is meant the transition of an individual or social object from one social group to another situation on the same level.... By vertical social mobility is meant the relations involved in a transition of an individual (or social object) from one social stratum to another.

Vertical mobility is the important focus of this paper.

For Black Americans, athletics are viewed as important career behavior possessing social advancement potential for their children (Coakley 1978). In a recent study by the Miller Brewing Company (1983), they report:

> Because blacks are a visible and well-respected presence on many sports teams and in individual events, sports is one profession which many young blacks aspire to.

The report acknowledges bi-racial support for the social progress of Blacks through sports:

> A majority (66%) of Americans believe there are more opportunities in sports (than in other fields) for the social advancement of blacks and other minorities....Blacks and whites are equally likely to agree that sports

> is a major road to social advancement for blacks, but blacks are more adamant in this belief - 45% of blacks, but only 31% of whites, strongly agree that this is true.

Within the sport-social mobility connection are essentially two basic schools of thought. One school is characterized as supporting the idea that sports participation has a positive effect on educational and occupational achievement, i.e. upward social mobility; the other argues that such activity has a negative influence (Bend and Petrie 1977). The sport-enhancing and sport-impeding rivalry is found throughout the literature on this popular topic (Braddock 1980). Some students of sport and mobility characterize the research literature as being atheoretical, over-emphasizing statistical methodology, the stressing of techniques over substances, with inadequate sampling, low return of questionnaires and inappropriate statistical procedures (Bend and Petrie 1977). Others have argued that the sport-impediment school in particular has suffered from methodological and design weaknesses and relied heavily on "impressionistic evidence or isolated case studies" (Braddock 1980). John Loy, in his UCLA study (1969) on social mobility, believes that research in the field is highly complex and multidimensional in nature.

A panoply of researchers have documented the benefits of sports participation on academic achievement at the high school level (Bend and Petrie 1977; Otto and Alwin 1977; Phillips and Schafer 1971; Picou 1978; Picou and Curry 1974; Rehberg and Schafer 1968; Schafer and Armer 1968;

Spady 1970). Bend (1968), using the Project Talent longitudinal data, found when comparing high school athletes with non-athletes that the athletes were more likely to graduate from college. Phillips and Schafer (1971), using social class and sub-culture concepts to review the literature, found that athletes receive slightly higher grades, are somewhat less likely to become delinquent, and that blue-collar athletes are more likely to experience upward mobility than non-athletes.

Picou (1978) conducted a most insightful piece of research regarding Black student-athletes at the high school level. He, like others, acknowledges the ground-breaking work of Coleman (1961) as stimulating research to determine the value of athletic participation for high school students. Using both Black and White Louisiana high school students, Picou discovered significant differences between Black and White students participating in sports. White students in the main had parents with higher levels of education than Black students. White students through their sports behavior showed a higher relationship with peer group plans, experiencing a greater academically-minded peer association and improved academic performance as a function of their athletic activity. In this sense the White student-athlete will likely begin to move in the "leading crowd" which has a higher percentage of college-bound peer members. In contrast, athletic behavior for Black students is unmediated through peers and had a direct impact on educational aspirations. Black students' aspirations are not mediated through peers as with Whites. The author points out that athletic achievement affords prediction of White students' academic performance and peer plans and of Black students' educational

aspirations. Educational encouragement by parents affects the educational goals for White students only. In summary, the Picou study shows White students make better grades and interact socially with a college-bound peer group. The Black student-athlete receives prestige through sport, but relevant behavior related to positive academic achievement does not change as a function of the athlete's activity nor does the Black athlete move into college-directed status groups in the high school environment. Other concepts may account for the different effect of athletics on the Black and White students. For example, significant others outside of peers, parents and teachers, such as coaches, extended family and yet undetermined factors, may influence the aspirations of Black and low-income youth (Snyder 1972). Picou (1978) explains, using Edwards' assessment, that athletic achievement for Blacks may be a function of self-concept or self-esteem, given the high status accorded sport achievement in the Black community (Edwards 1973). This study cautions not to overlook the somewhat obvious connection the Black athlete might see between college attendance, continued sports play and a professional athletic career. Such an attitude too may account for the unmediated impact of athletics on the academic goals of the Black student-athlete.

Sports sociologists have found that athletic participation must be accompanied by support from significant others to effectuate the athletes' aspirations to higher education (Picou 1978; Picou et al. 1978; Picou and Hwang 1979; Wells and Picou 1980). For both White and Black athletes, athletic achievement must foster highly personalized contact with college-bound peers, coaches and family members which in turn directs the student

to positive educational goals (Schafer and Rehberg 1970; Spreitzer and Pugh 1973; Otto and Alwin 1977).

These studies beg some analysis from the experience of African-Americans. Blacks in America have long understood the difference between the benefits of "going to school" and the necessity to "earn a living." Although education is highly valued in the Black community, it has often failed to produce the "meat and bread" realities achieved by Whites. Blau and Duncan (1969) reveal that when they controlled for education the "occupational status of Negroes is far inferior to that of whites in the United States....This is a clear indication of the serious discrimination Negroes with the same educational qualifications as whites suffer in the employment market." This research supports the customary wisdom of the Black community. With this background in mind a stellar athletic career may configurate as a more meaningful investment than the payoffs from academic pursuits and a "regular" job. Again the often cited difference between the high value placed on education by the Black community and the negative schooling process might help to explain the distinction between the college-bound aspirations of the Black athlete and the lack of preparedness for college. The author would speculate that the athletic role of the Black student is reinforced to the exclusion of the intellectual by the coaches, teachers, administrators and those responsible for his education, whereby the outstanding White athlete is more likely to be "tutored" by school personnel to the realities of scholastic success in college. In other words, there is significant intervention in the social and academic life of the White student-athlete by significant others. The

work of Picou and colleagues seem to support this interpretation.

Athletics has been lauded for its upward aspirational influence on those in lower social classes. Research in this area is inconclusive, however. Such a study by Rehberg and Schafer (1968) reported on a sample of 785 male high school seniors and determined that 62% of the athletes expected to enroll in a four-year college whereas 45% of the non-athletes had decided to attend college. Controlling for socioeconomic status, academic performance and parental encouragement, they found that athletic participation had its greatest effect on those less disposed to going to college. Using IQ scores and grade point averages, Schafer and Armer (1968) found 35% of the high IQ students participated in high school sport as compared to 22% of low IQ students. Another finding was that the GPAs of athletes were higher than those of non-athletes in all of the eight sub-groups of the four control variables. Others suggest that athletic life heightens the aspirations of the working class youth and of those youth with less achievement in their background (Loy 1969; Spreitzer and Pugh (1973). High-aspiring and achievement-oriented students have sufficient social support and benefit less from sport (Bend and Petrie 1977; Webb 1968). In this case, sport would have less impact than on low achievers demonstrating what some have described as the "ceiling effect" (Spreitzer and Pugh 1973). In contrast, Bend (1968) found sport provided little influence on grades of working class students; likewise, Lueptow and Kayser (1973) found similar results when examining the impact of athletics on "disadvantaged" students.

Social class background, nevertheless, seems to have significant

implications for social mobility and sports studies. Much of what has been attributed to sports might well be a function of social class antecedents (Coakley 1978; Webb 1968). Future research should focus on the social class standing of the Black athlete as it might interact with mobility outcomes.

Research findings which support positive outcomes from sports play is countered by those who reveal negative consequences. Buhrmann (1972) was interested in Coleman's (1961) findings that athletics had a detrimental effect on academic achievement in high school. His evidence reveals that athletes who compete in "high popularity" sports were consistently below the achievements of their non-athlete peers. "Elite" athletes, however, were more likely to attain higher grades than non-athlete peers. Sport activity without mutual extracurricular work tends to depress educational aspiration and ultimate attainment according to Braddock (1980); that is, if the student-athlete attends college primarily for sports playing, he is less likely to complete his educational goals.

Some sports sociologists contend that the relationship between athletics and academic achievement is unrelated (Hanks and Eckland 1976; Spreitzer and Pugh 1973). Hanks and Eckland in their highly respected study assert that athletics neither strengthen nor weaken academic performance. They contend that extracurricular activities are "largely orthogonal to one another and, further, have both dissimilar antecedents and outcomes." Spreitzer and Pugh, replicating the work of Rehberg and Schafer (1968) found no relationship between sport and cumulative grade averages.

What is the success of the student-athletes who participate in sports as a part of their university or college experience? For the sport-enhancing school, evidence supports the hypothesis that the positive effect of high school athletics "spills over" to improve chances of academic success in college (Picou 1978). A close review of the findings for the "spill-over" theory is at least contradictory. Spady (1970) reports in a follow-up study that college aspirations begun in high school bore fruit in college; high school athletes in higher percentages were enrolled in full-time college degree programs than were their non-athletic peers. Hanks and Eckland (1976) found high school athletic participation had little effect on the grades of college males or females.

Sage (1967), in a small yet well-controlled study, followed high school athletes to college sports, using high school athletes who chose not to play college sports as the control group. He found that the student-athlete in college was less successful academically than the non-athlete; non-athletes had better grades, were more interested in occupations and sought less involvement with fraternity and social life.

Again the data on the effect of intercollegiate sports on scholarship is in disagreement. Several of the better-known studies indicate intercollegiate sport has a positive academic impact. Werner and Gottheil (1966) reported positive academic attainment. They found a greater number of athletes in their sample graduated from West Point than did non-athletes. Loy (1969), whose work is burdened by the absence of a non-athlete control group, nevertheless points to the advancement of athletes at UCLA from low-income to higher socioeconomic positions than their

parents because of greater educational attainment. His results are weakened by the lack of a control group; such advancement might have been attributable to other intervening variables. Loy compares sons who are college graduates with fathers who are not always college graduates. A majority of research findings reveal an advancement of status of sons over fathers as a function of the general trend to upgrade position via education. Sack and Thiel (1979), in studying Notre Dame footballers, discern that (1) athletic participations pulls up low-social class players to incomes equal to non-athletes; (2) non-athletes overall have higher occupational status and obtain more advanced degrees; (3) first-squad players have higher incomes than second-stringers and reserves and are over-represented in executive positions. There are contra-indications within the study. In reviewing the Notre Dame work, Coakley (1982) highlights negative outcomes for Notre Dame footballers, citing lower GPAs, fewer advanced degrees and higher rates of cheating in scholastic work. Harry Webb (1968) determined which students had graduated five years after their initial enrollment at Michigan State University. He found the normal rate of graduation of non-athletes was 70% whereas only 49% of the team-athletes and 60% of the individual sport-athletes received their diplomas. In addition, only 38% of the Black athletes had graduated. A University of Colorado investigation, according to Eitzen and Sage (1978), records that football players had the poorest graduation record in ten varsity sports. Only 39% of all players graduated. The report continues, showing data on football players and graduation; of seven universities, four had poorer graduation rates than the University of Colorado.

McKnight (1972) conducted one of the few studies done in a Black college. He studied the academic achievements of athletes and non-athletes at Howard University, a predominantly Black university, and found the differences to be very slight. Shaw and Cordts (1960), reviewing the literature written between 1920 and the mid-1950s, found evidence to show that studies were "about evenly divided between studies indicating athletes are better scholars, athletes are the equal of other students scholastically, and to a somewhat lesser extent that athletes are inferior to the general student body in scholarship." A study in 1936 by Kissell (Bend and Petrie, 1977), looking over 44 studies on the relationship of sport activity to scholastic achievement in college, found few differences between athletes and non-athletes. Modern-day findings seem no more decisive.

Eitzen and Sage (1978) nevertheless defend the upward mobility thesis for White college athletes, although cautiously, because this position rests on no more than three or four studies. They observe, however, the White college player is upwardly mobile for three possible reasons:

1. "occupational sponsorship"--where the athlete marries a coed from a higher socioeconomic background than his own and is promoted to greater social and economic access through his wife's family than that achieved by the non-athlete.
2. "well-roundedness"--where the athlete has successful extracurricular experiences which make

him more valuable in the job market.

3. "character building"--where the athlete's attitudes and behavior which are valued in the marketplace are sharpened through sports competition.

The position of Eitzen and Sage as regards the social mobility of White athletes must be thoroughly reexamined as relates to Black athletes. First of all, Black male athletes are unlikely to marry Black coeds of appreciably higher economic status. Most Black students in White colleges come from working-class or lower middle-class families (Willie and McCord 1972). Highly affluent Black families, few to be found in the backgrounds of most Black college students, virtually eliminates this upward mobility option. Rarely will an interracial marital choice between Black males and White females occur, and even then the probability of marrying substantially above his socioeconomic status is unlikely.

Sports performance as a mediator of social contacts also deserves further consideration in the case of the Black athlete. The extracurricular activities which so often accompany big-time athletics is one example. Some Black footballers cited in unpublished interviews that White athletes are provided strategic access to influential alumni or already have such social ties upon entering a university. Black players contend they are consciously and by design excluded from interaction with high-status, powerful alumni, businessmen and prestigious social events.[1]

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[1]For example, Black football players at the University of Texas reported that only White players were chosen as Hosts for the fabled Legends of

Upward mobility through such experiences seems highly determined by the race of the athlete. Racism must surely be understood as an antecedent variable in sport-social mobility research.

As to the last attribute Eitzen and Sage link to sport, "character building" seems highly questionable in light of experiental and scientific literature. Many have taken issue with this assumption (Shaw 1972; Meggyesy 1971; Edwards 1969). Furthermore, in the North American experience personal and social characteristics have for decades been attributed to color (Jordan 1968). This historical observation has penetrating meaning for the so-called "character building" dimension in sport. The ability of sport achievement to transcend the salience of racism in determining social outcomes is highly questionable and unproven in the literature. In defining individual racism in White America, one scholar observes, "The individual racist is 'one who considers that black people as a group are inferior to (a) Whites (b) because of physical (genotypical and phenotypical) traits. He further believes that these physical traits are determinants of social behavior and moral or intellectual qualities, and ultimately presumes that this inferiority is a legitimate basis for inferior social treatment of Black people in American society'" (Jones 1981). Personal attitude of the Black athlete has been most critical in his sport experience. White coaches and athletic staffs are anxious to identify the Black

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[1](continued) Golf Tournament held annually in Austin, Texas. Being selected as a Host provided the opportunity to consort with influential and national celebrities.

the Black athlete with a "bad attitude." These young men are isolated and in some cases rejected as high school, college or professional players. In the practical world few of those in scouting or in charge of player recruitment assume the ability of sport to shape behavior or develop character over and above the athlete's existing temperament. The traits prescribed as indicators of "well-roundedness" and character are often thought lacking in Black athletes. The assumption commonly held is that such character is determined by biogenetic factors, the pre-potency and possession of which is with White players only.

Since the social turmoil of the 1960s, mobility of Black athletes through new educational opportunities has been discussed widely. Braddock (1980) defends involvement in athletics as a college-orienting function for Black youth. He states, "Whatever specific intervening mechanism may be found in future studies, it is apparent that within a traditional status attainment framework athletic achievement has positive consequences for orienting Black males toward college." The beneficial relationship between sport activity and social ascent is not confirmed by all. Sport sociologist Harry Edwards comes straight to the point, "Upon analysis, American sport is revealed to be more a treadmill than a fabled escalator providing escape from the deprivations afflicting the Black community" (1979). In characterizing the commercial nature of big-time football, Sack and Thiel (1979) sound a warning in the opening paragraphs of their research article on college football and the mobility of Notre Dame football players, "In other words, even if athletes benefit in a number of ways from high school sport, their experiences might be quite different at

the big-time college level." Scholars, experts and former college athletes have strongly suggested that life in intercollegiate athletics, particularly football and basketball, is a very different, difficult and disappointing experience (Edwards 1973; Green et al. 1972; Hoch 1972; Ruffer 1971; Sack 1977; Spivey and Jones 1975; Tolbert 1975; Underwood 1980; Webb 1968).

Roscoe C. Brown, Jr., (1974) is highly critical of the athletic system or the "jock trap," as he described it:

> Another aspect of the "jock trap," and probably the most tragic, is the fact that so many Black athletes simply do not get the education that they are entitled to, either in high school or in college, while they are lionized as athletic figures. The athletic system as it is presently conducted in our major high schools and major colleges tends to victimize the Black athlete in terms of his education. All athletes, Black, White, and Brown, deserve the opportunity to get a good education, an opportunity which is being denied to them because of the way the athletic system works.

McPherson (1977) cites the assessment by Olsen (1968) of the Black student-athlete, "Black collegiate and professional athletes report that they are de-humanized, exploited, and discarded, and some even report that they were happier back in the ghetto." Coakley (1982)

directs us to the fact that, contrary to popular opinion, about 90% of athletic scholarships go to White students, citing a 1968 HEW report that Black students received 6% of all athletic scholarships in America. Eitzen and Sage (1978) join the chorus of others citing negative consequences of sport. They observe, "But on the other hand, the evidence is clear and abundant that many Blacks have been exploited by their schools --receiving glory, perhaps, but little help in receiving a college diploma."

Coakley (1978) concludes that the Black student-athlete in higher education possesses a low probability for a successful academic career and an even lesser chance of receiving a college degree. Despite meeting college entrance requirements, the Black athlete is ill-equipped to capitalize upon the educational opportunity afforded by the athletic scholarship.

Webb (1968) in one of the important studies indicates that at Michigan State University where the normal graduation rate was 70%, 56% of the White athletes graduated and only 38% of the Black athletes received a degree. One year later at the same university, Shapiro (1970) found that 70% of the surveyed Black athletes (most of whom were football players) came to the university with the prime intention of "getting an education." Only 46% of the Black lettermen and only 33.3% of the Black football lettermen actually graduated. She noted that 76% of the White football players received degrees. Shapiro (1982) continued to find Whites out-graduating Blacks, 76% and 55.6% respectively. Over the years at Michigan State, Whites were found to have graduated in greater

numbers proportionally and White athletes' graduation rates declined slower than those for Black athletes.

Spivey and Jones (1975), using a 30-year period at the University of Illinois, show that 65% of the Black Illini student-athletes failed to graduate and only 14% advanced to a professional sports career. Many of these athletes were unprepared for the level of scholarship required, indicating that 96% of all Black Illini student-athletes surveyed fell below the ACT-predicted collegiate success quotients and had a higher "flunk-out" rate than the university's general academic attrition rate. In the same study the Black football and basketball players had a higher failure rate than those in track and fencing. In interpretation, the authors agree with Edwards that the Black athlete on the White university campus is there for the singular purpose of sports achievement and is expected to "sleep, eat, and drink athletics" (Edwards 1969).

Tolbert (1975) examines race in the Southwest Athletic Conference. His findings resemble those of Spivey and Jones (1975). Using institutional racism as the theoretical construct, Tolbert found only one-third of the Black student-athletes obtained a degree whereas over three-fourths of the Whites on athletic scholarships received degrees. Over half of the Black athletes but only one-fourth of the White athletes were majoring in physical education. Tolbert also found "athletic discrimination" as well as "academic discrimination." He found race also affected positional segregation, playing status and recruitment.

Recently numerous journals and magazines have carried negative accounts of experiences of Black athletes in colleges. John Underwood (1980)

in a recent portrayal of university athletics reports that an "unnamed university" disclosed that of 91 Blacks on varsity teams from 1968 to 1979, only ten had graduated. Thirteen more were on the verge of graduating. At best, the record would show that 23 of 91 Blacks graduated. Underwood (1980) cites Edwards' finding that at the University of California-Berkeley between 70-80 percent of the Black athletes do not graduate, even those who transfer from junior college with two years' experience.

Black baseball players were the subject of a study conducted by Pascal and Rapping (cited in McPherson 1977). Although roughly the same percentage of Black and White professional baseball players, 48% and 47% respectively, attended college, only 5% of the Black players and 14% of the White players ever graduated.

Brown (1974), in contrasting Black and White graduation rates, acknowledges that twice as many White athletes graduate as Black athletes.

Eitzen and Sage (1978) isolate three factors which account for the lack of social mobility for the Black student-athlete. First, they identify the "inordinate" amount of time and energy an athlete must devote to practice, travel and other "sport-related" activities. Second, the athlete is recruited for his physical ability and not for his academic strength. Black students from poor schools, the products of inferior educations, are incapable of the academic demands of the college classroom. Some researchers discovered that despite enrollment in "Mickey Mouse" courses or majoring in physical education, Black athletes still failed in coursework (Spivey and Jones 1975).

Summary and Conclusion

The relationship between sport participation and academic success is ambivalent and inconclusive. If sport does have an impact on academic goals, it does so only in affiliation with a range of sociopersonal and cultural variables (Bend and Petrie 1977). Participating in organized athletics translates into upward social mobility only as the participant parlays sports achievement into social relationships and skills essential to upwardly mobile outcomes (Coakley 1978). Studies show that general publicity and public fame are not sufficient to transform athletic achievement into educational achievement (Otto and Alwin 1977). Black athletes at both the high school and college levels do not seem to mediate their athletic behavior into essential social relationships. Without this important affiliation, high school Black athletes aspire to college absent the academic and social readiness. College failure is often the consequence when the demands of big-time sports and academic pressure coincide on the ill-prepared youth. White athletes more readily capitalize on their sports activity.

Although the investigation is sparse and in need of sophistication, race appears to influence the lack of social changes in the lives of young Black athletes. Athleticism seems insufficient to overcome the racist character of the American institutions including organized sports. Changes in social relations and improvement of academic skills seem offset by the race of the athlete. Some investigators argue that in the case of the Black athlete academic aspirations may be raised but not the student's grades (Bend and Petrie 1977). At the college level the Black athlete not

only does not benefit from the athletic experience but seems to be exploited by it. Speculation might be made that the Black athlete views college as an educational interlude with an eye on continuing sports play with the ultimate goal of a professional athlete career (Picou 1978).

The high prestige placed on the sports accomplishments by the Black community might influence the Black athlete (Braddock 1981). Selfhood, esteem and psychologically reinforcing sources in the community of the Black athlete, distinct from traditional school and peers, could influence the relation between sports and academics. Coaches and members of the extended family are influential within the African-American community and are possible sources of Black educational aspiration (Picou 1978). Another possible influence is the attitude of Black parents toward sports; Black parents are more likely to value highly the prospect of their children's sports play as a potential career activity than are White parents (Coakley 1978).

Most Black high school and college athletes come from working-class and middle-class backgrounds. Some studies suggest that athletics lift the aspirations of working-class youth and of those youth with less achievement in their backgrounds (Loy 1969; Spreitzer and Pugh 1973).

Social class backgrounds seem to have significant implications for social mobility and sports studies. Much of what has been attributed to sports might well be a function of social class antecedents (Coakley 1978; Webb 1968).

Although making important insights into the problems of big-time, big-money athletics, sociologists overlook particular factors endemic to

the Black college athlete (Eitzen and Sage 1978). For despite the barriers to upward mobility for Black college athletes, many Whites face the same demands and have similar academic shortcomings, yet they manage to graduate in significantly larger numbers. There are preliminary findings from a study in progress which points to a relationship between race of the athlete and academic achievement when comparing Black and White athletes at the University of Texas. Black athletes tend to come to the university with lower SAT scores and maintain lower GPA averages while in school and participating in sport. Black athletes at the University of Texas tend to score lower on the combined SAT when compared to Black and White students from the Southwest Region and when compared to Blacks and Whites at the national level. Well over three times as many White players have graduated as have Blacks.[2] One is also struck by the absence of research dealing with the attitudes, backgrounds and socialization patterns of coaches and athletic staff personnel as they may effect educational outcomes for athletes.

College student-athletes, unlike successful high school players, may not move in the "leading crowd" on campus. Academic and intellectually-oriented activities and athletes are an "oil and water" mix. Most "jocks" hang out with other "jocks" (Underwood 1980). In fact, one investigator found that collegiate sports may foster an anti-intellectual attitude (Sack 1977). Former athletes cite physical and psychological abuse and

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[2]The author is completing a case study of Black and White footballers at The University of Texas at Austin the Southwest Athletic Conference.

and exploitation of student-athletes by coaches and athletic staff personnel (Shaw 1972; Meggyesy 1971). Evidence points to the "powerlessness" of the student-athlete to direct his academic program; he finds himself with many non-academic courses selected for him for the sole purpose of remaining eligible (Edwards 1973). The student-athlete role in big-time athletic colleges has caused some scholars to propose a serious role conflict confronting the student (Coakley 1978). The height of this conflict is such that several sports scholars advocate the professionalization of college football and basketball, eliminating them from amateur athletic standing. Hanford believes football and basketball should be "exorcised" from college amateur athletic programs; Atwell proposes what he calls "deregulation" of big entertainment sport from NCAA governance. Accepting the professional quality of college football and basketball, he calls for paying athletes for their performances.[3]

The effect of sport on the White student-athlete dominates the literature. Studies on the Black students' mobility is rare and that which does exist at the college level clearly questions the assumptions of upward social mobility of the Black athlete. Large numbers of Black college athletes do not graduate from college in four years, and most never receive a degree. While often coming from poor socioeconomic circumstances,

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[3]Remarks delivered by George H. Hanford, President of the College Board, and Robert H. Atwell, Vice-President of the American Council on Education, at the Conference On Sport And Higher Education, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, New York, March 1983.

weak academic backgrounds and cultural lifestyles at variance with coaches and faculty, many Black athletes strive and perform under an intense and rigorous sports schedule (Coakley 1978). They do not make normal progress toward a degree, taking non-academic and/or "Mickey Mouse" courses for the primary purpose of remaining eligible (Eitzen and Sage 1978).

Black athletes are recruited to "play ball." Many of them are satisfied with that opportunity (Edwards 1973). Lurking in their minds is the chance at the "pros" (Edwards 1969).

McPherson (1977) is clear and to the point:

> For the black athlete, then the opportunity to move upward on the social scale may be restricted for the following reasons: there are relatively few positions open in the major professsional leagues; he frequently does not have a meaningful college education and degree to fall back on when his athletic career is finished; as with the white athlete, he must become a star before he can maximize economic rewards; no black athlete to date has developed the charisma which would be beneficial to a producer; and none has been able to gain access to positions of authority and power, either within or outside sport.

The McPherson conclusions fall short of a complete assessment of the social mobility barriers for the Black college athlete. One might be

suspect of the contention that even "Black stars" can readily convert sport achievement into financial rewards. In the rare instances where this does occur, Black athletes do not seem to reach the same levels of economic returns as do White athletes. What McPherson overlooks is that charisma or personality attributes are insufficient variables in countering the racist-economic structure of the White business community. The athlete in the main is only valuable to the producer if he is a White athlete. Institutional racism in collegiate and professional activity is continued in a race-caste structure which supports White-skin privilege in coaching, management, ownership and business production.

Thusly, Black athletic achievement does not seem to result in development of academic skills or in unqualified upward social mobility. If the Black athlete becomes a "commodity" and is treated accordingly, then academic achievement as a socially advancing activity is highly unlikely (Edwards 1969). In all deference to the low skills of some Black athletes, many are as intellectually capable as Whites of complete college. For them, academic and social counseling becomes critical given the aforementioned demands. What is the nature of the advising process as differentiated between Black and White athletes? How much critical and significant academic assistance is given the academically capable Black student-athlete? Is there a higher degree of anti-intellectualism active in the relationships of the Black athlete and the coaches and athletic staffs? Future research must answer these questions. This work must focus on race and social class variables as well as processes of socialization and social stratification as they effect mobility outcomes. One might

speculate that investigation will reveal that such antecedents will have equal if not greater effect than athletic behavior on social outcomes for athletes. Black athletes themselves outwardly seem to contribute to their demise. Convinced are many of them of the unfounded opinion that they have a future in professional playing. College then in their thinking simply is a stepping-stone to the "pros," and study or skills-building are secondary activities necessary to remain eligible. Sports playing as the priority in college assures academic failure (Braddock 1980).

Young Black athletes almost invariably dream of "going to the pros" (Edwards 1969). Coaches psychologically capitalize on this desire and seemingly "string out" the Black athlete, reinforcing him to total commitment with the "pro contract" as the carrot on a stick. Coaches fail to indicate that only 1-2% will play professional football or basketball. This unsavory practice takes place on college campuses where occupational preparation is supposedly conducted with a keen assessment of the student's abilities to meet the demands of one's future profession.

The findings on this review bear serious implications for the Black youth in America. For them, often poor and poorly educated in a racist societal structure big on fantasy and slim on opportunities, big-time football and basketball is conceived as the primary meal ticket away from invisibility, misery and poverty. Forced into uncaring and irrelevant schools, bottlenecked into the narrow set of jobs permissible to Black youth, athletic glory and fortune deludes thousands of young Black men and now possibly more Black women into aspirations to professional athletic careers (Edwards 1973). The perpetration of this cruel hoax on Black

youth must be disclosed. Sports is a means to an end, not an end in itself.

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